



AAC Publications

Latok III (6,949m), West Face

Asia, Pakistan, Panmah Muztagh

One of the Latok group's most coveted objectives, the 2,000m west face of Latok III, was finally climbed by a four-man Russian team led by Alexander Odintsov. The ascent realized an 11-year dream for the veteran leader. Considering past events on this mountain, his achievement is all the more remarkable.

Americans made strong attempts on this wall, in 1992 and 1998, before Odintsov's first attempt, in 2000. Latok III was part of an on-going program entitled "The Russian Way—Big Walls of the World," whose goal was putting up routes on 10 of the highest mountain walls in the world. By that stage his teams had already climbed large new routes on Pik 4,810m and Ak-su in the Pamir Alai, the Troll Wall, Bhagirathi III, and Great Trango Tower.

On Latok III the 2000 team bailed at 5,835m, after Yuri Koshelenko was injured by stonefall. The epic retreat, with Efimov and Ruchkin being hit by a large avalanche, Ruchkin emerging with three broken ribs and a damaged neck, and Efimov being swept 350m to the bottom of the face and escaping with only a broken leg, is well told in AAJ 2001.

The following year only Odintsov and Ruchkin were keen to return. Odintsov enlisted four more climbers, and this time the team reached 6,250m at a snowfield they named the Tomahawk. Next day all but Igor Barikhin, who was jumaring to remove gear, had reached a higher bivouac, when a large gendarme dropped from the summit ridge. Rocks cut through Barikhin's rope, and he fell to the foot of the face.

In 2008 another Russian team, this time led by the accomplished Valery Shamalo, made another attempt, but had only climbed 500m when a stone smashed the knee of one climber and the expedition retreated to St Petersburg.

But for Odintsov the wall wouldn't go away, so in 2011 he assembled a small team of young, talented climbers who, in his words, "wouldn't know how hard it is." He also went earlier in the season; while wintry conditions would make the climbing harder, the route would be objectively less threatened. To make things even safer they would only climb in the morning, sitting out the afternoon sun, stonefall, and icefall at a protected camp.

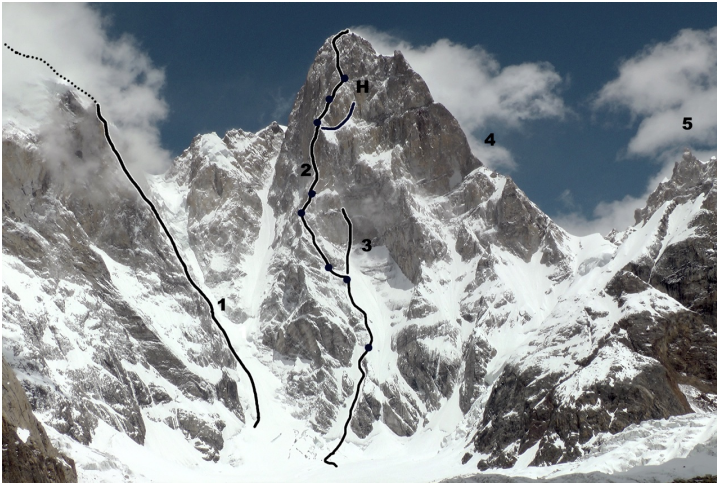
Evgeny Dmitrienko, Ivan Dozhdev, Alex Lonchinsky, and Odintsov spent from June 10 to 25 making their largely capsule-style, 63-pitch ascent, following the 2001 line. After climbing most of the lower couloir alpine style over three days, hauling two portaledge, the team established five more camps above. Where in 2001 Alexander Klenov, leading the party, had free-climbed in rock shoes, the young guns now had to use boots, crampons, and often aid. They reached the previous high point, where Odintsov removed the bolt that had secured Barikhin 10 years earlier, so he could give it to his widow. Above they were surprised to find the final ropelengths to the summit much more difficult than expected.

During the ascent the team was inflicted by poor weather, losing several days to rain or snow, but only when they were back at base camp and the real storms began, did they realize how lucky they had been. Once again, though, they'd not escaped unscathed. During the descent a falling rock broke

Lonchinsky's arm.

Latok III was the ninth of the Russian Big Walls (the five already mentioned, plus Great Sail Peak, Jannu, and Kyzyl Asker) and was awarded Russian 6B. For Odintsov it was only surpassed in difficulty by his route up the southeast face of Kyzyl Asker. Meru Shark's Fin was to be the 10th in the project, but with the American success the Russians will be looking elsewhere.

Images



West face of Latok III rises 2,000m above Baintha Lukpar Glacier. (1) South face of Latok I (7,145m; Matsumi, Shigehiro, and Watanabe, then Endo, Muto, and Oko, 1979). (2) 2011 Russian Route, with eight bivouacs marked. (H) 2001 attempt high point and site of Borikhin's accident. (3) 2000 Russian attempt and high point. (4) Southwest ridge. (5) Latok V (6,190m).



Battling elements during first ascent of Latok III west face.



High on west face of Latok III.

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